# *The popish doctrine of auricular confession and priestly absolution considered.*

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A

# SERMON

PREACHED AT

# *SALTERS-HALL,*

MARCH 13, MDCCXXXIV.

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By *JOSEPH BURROUGHS.*

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JOHN XX. 21, 22, 23.

*Then ſaid Jeſus to them again, Peace be unto you; as my Father hath ſent me, even ſo ſend I you. And when he had ſaid this, he breathed on them, and ſaith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghoſt; whoſeſoever ſins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whoſeſoever ſins ye retain, they are retained.*

THE province aſſign'd to me is to treat of *auricular confeſſion* and *prieſtly abſolution*: the former of which is one of the firſt things required in the Romiſh *ſacrament of penance*, and the other the completion of it. I have choſen for the foundation of my diſcourſe that text, on which the greateſt ſtreſs is laid with regard to the power of abſolution: and this will naturally bring in all thoſe things which are preparatory to it.

In my diſcourſe I propoſe,

I. To ſet forth, from authentic records, the doctrine of the church of *Rome* on theſe heads.

II. To examine the ground upon which they herein proceed.

I. To ſet forth, from authentic records, the doctrine of the church of *Rome* on the heads of *auricular confeſſion* and *prieſtly abſolution.*

Now nothing can be more authentic in this caſe than the council of *Trent.* And this council declares concerning the ſacrament of penance in general; * 'That our Lord then chiefly inſtituted it, when being raiſed from the dead he *breathed on his diſciples, ſaying, Receive ye the Holy Ghoſt; whoſeſoever ſins ye remit, they are remitted to them; and whoſeſoever ye retain, they are retained.* In which ſo remarkable a fact and in ſo clear expreſſions *(they affirm)* the power of remitting and retaining ſins, in order to the reconciling of the faithful, who have lapſed after baptiſm, was communicated to the apoſtles and their legitimate ſucceſſors.' It is plain, that they here aſcribe to *the apoſtles and their legitimate ſucceſſors,* (who in the 6th chap. of the ſame ſeſſion are explained to be *biſhops and prieſts)* the power of *remitting and retaining ſins* in the literal ſenſe. For † they ſpeak of *penance* as 'a ſacrament appointed for the remiſſion of ſins; a remedy of life to thoſe who after baptiſm ſhould deliver up themſelves into the ſlavery of ſin and power of the devil; by which ſacrament *(they ſay)* the benefit of Chriſt's death is applied to thoſe who lapſe after baptiſm.' And, to make the matter fully clear, they frankly acknowledge; ‡ 'that the form of the ſacrament of penance, in which chiefly its force lies, conſiſts in thoſe words of 'the

* Concil. Trident. Seſſ. XIV. cap. 1. † Ibid.
‡ Cap. 3.

'the miniſter, *I abſolve thee*; and that the 'prayers, which according to the cuſtom of 'holy church are laudably added, do not at all 'belong to the eſſence of the form, *(they are the council's own words)* 'nor are neceſſary to the 'adminiſtration of the ſacrament itſelf.'

Having thus laid the foundation of their ſacrament in prieſtly abſolution; they make no doubt to build upon it the neceſſity of confeſſion to the prieſt, in order to his granting the abſolution deſired. For they affirm; * 'that in the 'very inſtitution of this ſacrament of penance, 'as before explained, there was likewiſe inſtitu-'ted by our Lord an intire confeſſion of ſins: 'and that ſuch confeſſion is *jure divino* neceſſary 'to all thoſe who fall into ſin after baptiſm; 'becauſe, (if you will take their word for it) 'our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, when he was going to 'aſcend from earth to heaven, left the prieſts his 'vicars, as *preſidents* and *judges*, before whom 'all mortal ſins into which the faithful might 'fall ſhould be brought, to the end that, ac-'cording to the power of the keys for remit-'ting or retaining of ſins, they might pronounce 'ſentence.' And agreeably hereto, they have the confidence to ſpeak of the confeſſary's chair as † 'a *tribunal*, before which the lapſed are to 'be ſiſted as criminals, that by the ſentence 'of the prieſt they may be deliver'd from their 'ſins.' Nay, they are ſo clear in this point, as to affirm, ‡ 'that a prieſt who is under 'the guilt of mortal ſin may by virtue of

'the

* Seſſ. XIV. cap. 5. † Cap. 2.
‡ Cap. 6.

'the holy Spirit conferr'd on him in his 'ordination, as a miniſter of Chriſt, exer-'ciſe the function of remitting ſins.' For which they aſſign this admirable reaſon: 'that 'tho' the abſolution of a prieſt is the diſpenſing 'of a benefit which proceeds from another; yet 'it is not a meer naked miniſtry, either of 'preaching the goſpel, or of declaring that ſins 'are forgiven; but is to be conſidered as *a judi-'cial action*, in which a ſentence is pronounced 'by him in quality of a *judge*.' Now 'this 'judgment,' they wiſely * obſerve, 'the prieſt 'could not exerciſe without taking cognizance 'of the cauſe; nor maintain equity in enjoining 'puniſhments, if the penitents ſhould declare 'to him their ſins only in general, and not in a 'ſpecial and particular manner.' From whence they collect, (and the whole ſuperſtructure of this doctrine of auricular confeſſion is meer collection and inference from a perverted text of ſcripture which is laid as the foundation) † that 'penitents ought in confeſſion to recount all 'mortal ſins, even the moſt ſecret, of which 'they are conſcious after a diligent diſcuſſion; 'and likewiſe, for the reaſons before mentioned, 'all thoſe particular circumſtances which alter 'the kind of ſin.'

As to the manner of confeſſing in ſecret before the prieſt alone; they have the aſſurance to affirm, that ‡ 'this ſacramental confeſſion had 'been uſed by holy church from the beginning, 'and always commended by the moſt holy and 'moſt ancient fathers.' But they are more conſiderate

* Seſſ. XIV. cap. 5. † Ibid. ‡ Ibid.

ſiderate than to offer at any proof earlier than the fourth *Lateran* council, held in the year MCCXV; which ſeems to have been the firſt that * enjoin'd this confeſſion to be practis'd once every year. They might indeed have quoted a † provincial council in *France*, held about the year DCL, which declared 'repentance of ſins, which 'is the remedy of the ſoul, to be uſeful to all'; and decreed, that 'penance ſhould by the prieſts 'be appointed to penitents upon their con-'feſſion.' But if they could have quoted much more early, or more conſiderable teſtimonies than this, from any of thoſe *moſt holy and moſt ancient fathers*, of whom they were ſo wiſe as to ſpeak only in general terms; yet it wou'd have availed nothing in this caſe, where ſcripture and common ſenſe are againſt them.

It has been already obſerved, that the ‡ council of *Trent* makes an intire confeſſion of ſins, (that very confeſſion, which in the ſame ſentence they require ſhould be made by a prieſt in the quality of *preſident* and *judge)* to be *jure divino* neceſſary to all thoſe who fall into ſin after baptiſm. But they are yet more particular and more terrible. For in the ſixth canon they 'anathematize all thoſe who ſhall deny that 'ſacramental confeſſion is *jure divino neceſſary* '*to ſalvation*:' and in the ſeventh, 'all thoſe 'who ſhall venture to ſay, that in the ſacrament 'of penance it is not *jure divino* neceſſary to 'the remiſſion of ſins to confeſs all and every 'mortal

* Concil. Lateran. cap. 21. apud *Labbé*, Tom. XI. par. 1. edit. *Par.* 1671. pag. 172, 173.

† Concil. Cabilon. can. 8. apud *Labbé*, Tom. VI. pag. 389.

‡ Seſſ. XIV. cap. 5.

'mortal ſin, even the moſt ſecret, which can 'with diligent premeditation be call'd to mind, 'together with the circumſtances which change 'the kind of ſin:' in the ninth, 'all thoſe who 'ſhall deny prieſtly abſolution to be *a judicial* '*act*:' and in the tenth, 'all thoſe who ſhall 'deny, that prieſts under mortal ſin have the 'power of binding and looſing; or affirm, that 'any other than prieſts are the miniſters of ab-'ſolution.'

And theſe things I take notice of the rather, becauſe of a moſt unlucky circumſtance, with which this whole affair is attended; which is the making the prieſt's good intention neceſſary to the ſalutary effect of the abſolution he gives. This is cautiouſly expreſſed in one of the * canons of the *Trent* council: which 'anathematizes any man who ſhall affirm, that 'ſins are remitted to him who confeſſes them, 'when the prieſt abſolves not in earneſt, but 'in jeſt.' And one wou'd think, by the cautiouſneſs of the expreſſion, that the fathers of that council had found themſelves hard preſs'd with this doctrine of the neceſſity of the prieſt's good intention: which it is certain hangs like a milſtone about the neck of all the Romiſh ſacraments; and renders it impoſſible for a Romaniſt to prove, that there is at this day any ſuch thing as a prieſt, or indeed a chriſtian, in the world; becauſe no man can certainly tell, whether the perſon from whom he received orders, or baptiſm, perform'd the ſervice with the intention which the church requires. For thus pope

* Seſs. XIV. can. 9.

† pope *Eugene* IV, in his decree at the council of *Florence*, held about the year MCCCCXL, expreſsly declares: 'All theſe ſacraments, (*i. e.* all the ſeven, among which that of penance is particularly mentioned) are made up of theſe three parts: 'that is to ſay; of things, as the matter; of 'words, as the form; and of the perſon of the 'miniſter who confers the ſacrament, with the 'intention of doing that which the church 'does: of which three if any one be wanting, 'the ſacrament is not perfected.' But indeed the council of *Trent* itſelf ſpeaks plainly enough of this matter, to deſerve to be charged with all the impious conſequences which follow this doctrine. For they expreſsly tell their penitents;‡ 'that they ought not ſo to flatter them-'ſelves concerning their own faith, as to think 'that they are abſolved truly and before God, 'when the prieſt has not a mind to act ſeriouſly 'and abſolve truly.' Monſtrous impiety! and moſt unhappy penitents! to whom no humiliation before an offended God, no ſatisfaction made to an injured neighbour, no reſolution or endeavours of amendment, no real reformation of heart and life, nor all theſe together, can avail any thing, without the good-will of the prieſt! and whom, according to this deteſtable doctrine, God himſelf cannot abſolve from ſin, unleſs the prieſt too, when he pretends to abſolve in words, is ſo good as to do it with the ſerious intention of his heart!

But beſides the confeſſion, of which I have been treating, and beſides that contrition which



* *Labbé*, Tom. XIII. pag. 535. † Seſs. XIV. cap. 6.

is to attend it; there is another thing inſiſted on by the church of *Rome*, before ſhe will allow her prieſts to exerciſe their good intentions in giving abſolution. Certain puniſhments are, at the prieſt's diſcretion, enjoin'd to the penitents, under pretence of * making them more diligent for the future. Theſe they call *ſatisfaction*; and make them a neceſſary part of their ſacrament of penance; as neceſſary as contrition or confeſſion. For the inſtitutes of their canon law expreſsly tell us†, 'that neither contrition nor confeſſion avail 'much, unleſs to both theſe be added ſatiſ-'faction;' which in the ſame ſentence is called 'a ſort of compenſation for an injury done.' And the council of *Trent* ſpeaks as effectually as can be to the ſame purpoſe, when it ‡ anathematizes 'thoſe who ſhall deny, that con-'trition, confeſſion and ſatisfaction are all of 'them neceſſary in the ſacrament of penance 'to the intire and perfect remiſſion of ſins.' Now, this ſatisfaction, the || council of *Florence* frankly tells you, is to be made *ſecundum arbitrium ſacerdotis*, 'according to the will and plea-'ſure of the prieſt, tho' chiefly by prayer and 'faſting, and alms.' Let it therefore be called 'a ſatisfaction made unto God through Jeſus 'Chriſt;' as it is by the council of *Trent*;** and let it be colour'd over ever ſo plauſibly with the appearances of religion: yet as long as the appointing of this ſatisfaction is ſolely in the will and pleaſure of the prieſt, it is plain that the great

* Concil. Trid. Seſs. XIV. cap. 8.
† Lib. II. tit. 5. ‡ Seſs. XIV. can. 4.
|| *Labbé*, Concil. tom. XIII. pag. 538.
** Seſs. XIV. cap. 9.

great concern is made the ſatisfying of him: if he be not well ſatisfied, there is no abſolution to be had. If the penitent is not to the full as liberal to the church, and (I may add) to the prieſt in particular, as the prieſt himſelf thinks he ſhould be; let him break his heart with contrition, and run ever ſo great a riſque by expoſing his ſecret ſins and his moſt important affairs in confeſſion; yet it all ſignifies nothing. Indeed effectual care is taken by the council of *Trent* to make the penitents liberal. For they plainly tell the prieſts,* 'that they ought, as 'far as the Spirit and prudence ſhall ſuggeſt, to 'enjoin ſalutary and ſuitable ſatisfactions, ac-'cording to the quality of the crimes, *and the* '*ability of the penitents:* leſt if they ſhou'd 'connive at the ſins confeſs'd, and deal too 'indulgently with the penitents, enjoining the 'ſlighteſt works for the greateſt crimes, they 'ſhould become partakers of other mens ſins.'

Thus important are the prieſts made: who by the church of *Rome* are conſtituted *judges* and *arbiters* in the whole affair of repentance; even with regard to many things which one would think ſhould be tranſacted between the penitent himſelf and God alone.

But it muſt be obſerv'd; that to keep the people the more effectually in ſubjection, there are ſome extraordinary caſes reſerved to the deciſion of the pope, and to biſhops in their reſpective dioceſes; concerning which the common prieſts are not allowed to judge. Only in the article of death there is no reſervation;



* Seſs. XIV. cap. 8.

and therefore in that caſe, ‘ all prieſts are al-
‘ lowed to abſolve any penitent from any kind
‘ of ſins and cenſures.’ So ſays the * council of *Trent*. And ſo the Roman ritual, † publiſhed by authority of pope *Paul* V: preſcribing in that caſe only this ſhort form; *I abſolve thee from all cenſures and ſins, in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghoſt, Amen.* The forms of abſolution in ordinary caſes are longer; and the ſtreſs is openly laid, not upon that part wherein the prieſt ‘ prays that God would have ‘ mercy upon the penitent, and, forgiving his ‘ ſins, guide him to eternal life;’ for this, and another form to the ſame purpoſe, the prieſt is ‡ expreſsly told he may omit: but upon the following form, which I ſhall take the liberty to repeat. ‖ *Our Lord Jeſus Chriſt abſolve thee: and I, by his authority, do abſolve thee, from every bond of excommunicaton,* † [*ſuſpenſion*] *and interdict, ſo far as I am able, and thou ſtandeſt in need. Moreover I abſolve thee from all ſins in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghoſt, Amen.* To this form is uſually join'd another; which for its irreverence to our bleſſed Saviour, and contrariety to his doctrine, I cannot tell how to look upon as any thing better than antichriſtian: in theſe words. ** *The paſſion of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt; the merits of the bleſſed virgin* Mary *and of all the ſaints; whatſoever good thou haſt done; and whatſoever evil thou haſt ſuffered;*

* Seſs. XIV. cap. 7.
† Ritual. Rom. edit. 8vo. Antuerp. 1635. pag. 67.
‡ Ibid. ‖ Ritual. pag. 66.
† *N. B.* This word [ſuſpenſion] is added only in caſe the penitent be a clergyman. ** Pag. 67.

*fered; be unto thee for remiſſion of ſins, increaſe of grace, and reward of eternal life. Amen.*

There are particular forms and meaſures appointed by the ritual for reſtoring of perſons excommunicate to the communion of the faithful. There is likewiſe a method provided for abſolving the dead, if in their life time they had given ſigns of contrition. But I will not detain you with the * recital.

I cannot

* I ſhall take the liberty to offer to my reader what wou'd have been too tedious from the pulpit. Among the meaſures for reſtoring a living excommunicate; the penitent, if his crime be very great, is to take an oath, that he will obey the commands of the church which ſhall be laid upon him on that account: and eſpecially, that he will not thenceforward ever offend againſt that canon or decree, for the violating whereof he has incurr'd cenſure. Then he is to kneel down on both knees, and upon the ſhoulder, cover'd only with his ſhirt, (if it be a man) to be laſh'd gently by the prieſt with a rod or cords, till the prieſt has recited a whole pſalm appointed for that purpoſe. Then, after ſeveral prayers and reſponſes, during which the prieſt is to be uncovered, he at length ſits down, covers his head, and delivers a form, wherein he declares; that 'he, by the authority of Jeſus Chriſt, 'join'd with that of the pope, or the biſhop, or other ſuperior 'concern'd in the affair, does abſolve him from his excommu-'nication, in the name of the Father,' *&c. Ritual.* pag. 68, 69. In order to the abſolution of the dead excommunicate; the body, if not yet buried, is to be beaten, and abſolved, and then ſuffer'd to be buried in conſecrated ground: if buried in a profane place, to be dug up, and after the ſame ceremonies to be buried in holy ground: but if it cannot conveniently be dug up, then the burying place is to be beaten, inſtead of the dead body: if buried in holy ground, then only the ſepulchre to be beaten. During which beating, whether of the body or the ſepulchre, the prieſt is to pronounce a certain form of words, and have reſponſes made to him. After which follows the form of abſolution, in theſe words: *I do, according to the authority granted to me, abſolve thee from the bond of excommunication which thou haſt incurred, [or art declared to have incurred] for ſuch a fact; and reſtore thee to the communion of the faithful: in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghoſt. Amen.* And then the whole work is concluded with prayers and reſponſes. *Ritual.* pag. 70, 71.

I cannot diſmiſs this ritual without obſerving; that it directs the prieſts * 'to aſk *prudent* 'queſtions in ſuch caſes where the penitent does 'not expreſs the number, the kinds, and the 'neceſſary circumſtances of his ſins:' and that tho' † it bids them take heed that they do not 'detain the penitents with curious or unprofitable 'queſtions, eſpecially the younger people of ei-'ther ſex, or other perſons, concerning things 'which they are ignorant of; leſt they ſhould 'thereby take offence and learn to ſin:' yet the penitent is intirely at the mercy of the prieſt whether he ſhall be aſked ſuch queſtions or not: that it is notorious theſe things are often done, to the violation of all rules of modeſty and decency; and ſuch thoughts of any kind ſuggeſted by the wicked prieſts, as may beſt ſerve the purpoſes of their lewdneſs, avarice, or malice: and that in the circumſtances in which confeſſion is eſtabliſh'd by the church of *Rome*, there is no way to prevent ſuch evils.

The effect of this ſacrament of penance, (the ‡ council of *Trent* tells us) 'with regard to its 'force and efficacy, is reconciliation with God:' agreeably to what they had affirmed a little before; 'that || the power of remitting and retain-'ing ſins was given to biſhops and prieſts for that 'purpoſe;' and 'that ** this their ſacrament is 'neceſſary to the ſalvation of thoſe who have 'ſinned after baptiſm.'

Thus I have ſet forth from authentic records the doctrine of the church of *Rome* concerning auricular confeſſion and prieſtly abſolution: in the

* Ritual. pag. 63. † Pag. 63, 64.
‡ Seſs. XIV. cap. 3. || Cap. 2. ** Ibid.

the doing which I could not avoid adding ſome other things relating to their ſacrament of penance, which are neceſſarily connected with theſe two articles. If I have drawn out the account into too great a length, it was becauſe I feared that a very brief relation would not give you a ſufficient notion of doctrines, which you would wonder ſhould ever enter the minds of profeſs'd chriſtians. The ſetting them forth thus largely will, I hope, in the minds of proteſtants, who are acquainted with their bible, and acknowledge that for the only rule of their faith, go a good way towards a confutation, and thereby ſhorten my remaining work. However, I beg leave, according to my propoſed method,

II. To examine the ground, upon which the church of *Rome* herein proceeds.

And here it will be neceſſary to conſider attentively thoſe texts of ſcripture, upon which they lay a ſtreſs in this argument: for they are forced in this caſe to have recourſe to ſcripture, becauſe they know that the common ſenſe and reaſon of mankind are againſt them: and they are glad to catch at any plauſible appearances, ariſing from a perverſion of ſingle difficult paſſages, detach'd from ſuch as wou'd ſufficiently explain them; becauſe they know, that a fair compariſon of one part of ſcripture with another wou'd turn to their confuſion.

But I cannot forbear obſerving what a meer farce the council of *Trent* acts, in appealing to ſcripture at all, for the ſupport of their doctrine of confeſſion and abſolution; when they had

had before laid it down as a rule, 'that it be-
'longs to * mother church alone to judge of
'the true ſenſe of holy ſcripture; and decreed,
'that no perſon whatever, truſting to his own
'prudence, in matters of faith or manners, be-
'longing to the edification of chriſtian doctrine,
'wreſting the ſcripture to his own ſenſe, ſhould
'dare to interpret the holy ſcripture contrary to
'that ſenſe which holy mother church hath
'held and doth hold, or contrary to the una-
'nimous conſent of the fathers.' What a farce, I ſay, is it, after all this, to appeal to ſcripture? For if the decrees of the *Trent* council were ever deſigned to be of any uſe to the common people, (and if they were not, why do the fathers of that council, in their canons, oblige all without exception, under the penalty of a ſevere curſe, to receive their doctrine?) if, I ſay, they were deſign'd to be of any uſe to the people, the quoting of ſcripture can never anſwer any ſuch purpoſe; becauſe the common people can make no judgment at all about it, for want of knowing *what ſenſe holy mother church has always put upon ſcripture*, and what has been *the unanimous conſent of the fathers* with relation to it. Nay, even if the decrees of this council were deſign'd only for the uſe of the prieſts, as one would be tempted to think they were: yet to what purpoſe is it to quote ſcripture? when, by appropriating *to the church alone* the right of interpreting ſcripture, they have taken it out of the power even of the prieſts to judge for themſelves: beſides that it is as impoſſible for the prieſts

* Seſs. IV.

prieſts as the people to know *the unanimous conſent of the fathers*; ſince it is well known that the fathers have differ'd very much in their judgments from each other.

But ſince notwithſtanding theſe things they do pretend to ſhew reſpect to ſcripture, where they think it may ſerve their turn; let us examine whether the texts they produce can ſupport the weight they lay upon them.

They tell us: 'our * Lord then chiefly inſtituted the ſacrament of penance, when being raiſed from the dead he *breathed upon his diſciples, and ſaid*; *Receive ye the Holy Ghoſt*; *whoſe ſins ſoever ye remit, they are remitted, and whoſeſoever ye retain, they are retained.*' And upon this text therefore they chiefly ground the power of the prieſt's authoritative abſolution, and the neceſſity of auricular confeſſion.

But nothing beſides their uſurped power of interpreting for all the chriſtian world, could enable them to impoſe ſuch a ſenſe as this upon our Saviour's words. If it were true, that this was our Lord's mind with regard to the apoſtles themſelves, the contrary to which I think is evident; yet how will this convey to the ordinary prieſts, in all ſucceeding ages, a power of granting authoritative abſolutions at their own diſcretion; or of claiming a particular confeſſion of ſecret ſins in order thereto? When Chriſt *breathed upon the apoſtles*, as a token of conferring the Holy Ghoſt upon them, did he at the ſame time breathe upon all the prieſts that were to come into the world? Did he by the



* Concil. Trident. Seſſ. XIV. cap. 1.

ſame action, or indeed by any other, convey the Holy Ghoſt to them? Did he give to them, or even to biſhops themſelves, all the ſame powers which he gave to the apoſtles?

It is evident that the words in queſtion were ſpoken to the apoſtles, and to them alone, on the day when our Saviour aroſe from the dead: and we are to judge, by the circumſtances of the perſons to whom they were delivered, as well as by the words themſelves, whether our Lord meant to apply them to any other than their own perſons.

To the apoſtles it was ſaid with great propriety: *As my Father hath ſent me, even ſo ſend I you.* For this was an immediate and extraordinary miſſion of the apoſtles by our Lord Jeſus Chriſt; as was that of Chriſt himſelf by his heavenly Father; tho' there was an unſpeakable difference in the dignity of the perſons ſent, and in the extenſiveneſs of the work. However, here was full power given by Chriſt to his apoſtles, to perform the work aſſigned to them; as there was by the Father to the Son, for the ſervice in which he was to be employ'd. But will any man therefore affirm, that hereby were convey'd to biſhops and prieſts in ſucceeding ages all the powers convey'd to the apoſtles? As well might he affirm, that the apoſtles did in this their miſſion from Chriſt receive all thoſe powers with which Chriſt himſelf was inveſted, and that they were ſent to do in all reſpects the ſame work.

But not to inſiſt any longer on theſe introductory words; I proceed to thoſe immediately following,

following, upon which the great ſtreſs is laid. *And when he had ſaid this, he breathed on them; and ſaid unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghoſt; whoſeſoever ſins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whoſeſoever ſins ye retain, they are retained.*

Now, make as little allowance as you pleaſe for the ſtrong figurative manner of ſpeaking in the eaſtern countries; yet do but allow that Chriſt underſtood what he was doing while he ſpoke theſe words, and I will appeal to you, or indeed to any man living, whether he cou'd poſſibly extend them to that ſenſe, which you have ſeen the church of *Rome*, and particularly the council of *Trent*, aſcribes to them. Can our Lord, by any conſtruction of theſe words, be ſuppoſed to have left prieſts his vicars, as 'preſidents and judges, before whom all mortal 'ſins into which the faithful might fall ſhould 'be brought, that according to the power of 'the keys for remitting or retaining ſins they 'might pronounce ſentence?' Can any man believe, that in order hereunto 'there was vir-'tually inſtituted by the ſame words an intire 'confeſſion of ſins to the prieſt;' and a power likewiſe conferred to enjoin what penances he ſhould think fit, and then to ſay to the penitent, *I abſolve thee?* Can any man really believe, that our Lord deſign'd ſuch a proceſs ſhould have the effects which the council of *Trent* aſcribes to it? particularly, that hereupon ſhould follow 'reconciliation with God;' and that yet it ſhould not be in the power of God to be reconciled to the penitent, where the prieſt happen'd

to with-hold his good intentions when he pronounced the words of abſolution?

It is impoſſible, I ſay, that ſuch things as theſe ſhould ever have been in our Lord's intention: and particularly impoſſible, that he ſhould have given to men the power of diſpenſing pardons in an arbitrary manner. The Son of God can never be ſuſpected of giving any ſuch power; ſince it would be inconſiſtent with the power of the divine Being himſelf: for beſides what is to be ſaid concerning frail mortal men in general, ſubject to paſſions and prejudices and miſtakes; and beſides that it is well known, thouſands of prieſts are ſtupidly ignorant, of the chriſtian religion, and almoſt of every thing elſe; it is certain, that wicked men (ſuch as the council of *Trent* muſt acknowledge *prieſts under mortal ſin* to be) might be erroneous enough to diſpenſe pardons, where an all-wiſe and perfectly holy God, even with all his infinite mercy, would ſee good reaſon to refuſe them.

It is indeed hard to conceive, how any man ſhould in earneſt believe theſe things. But this interpretation of our Saviour's words gives ſuch an acceſſion of power to the Romiſh biſhops and prieſts; that any one, who obſerves their numerous incroachments in other reſpects, cannot much wonder they ſhould inſiſt upon it. But they have no other way to make ſuch interpretations paſs, than by detaching ſingle ſentences from their context; making no compariſon with other texts which wou'd explain them; following, as in the caſe of tranſubſtantiation, the ſtrict literal ſenſe, where it is moſt evident that

ſenſe

ſenſe cou'd never be intended; and making no allowance for figures of ſpeech, where it is moſt evident they were deſigned; nor any conſideration of the character and circumſtances of the perſons ſpeaking or ſpoken to.

It is eaſy to darken any expreſſions whatever by ſuch methods as theſe, and to give them a ſenſe altogether different from what the ſpeaker or writer intended; whereas if we will take fair and candid meaſures of interpretation, a clear light may be thrown upon paſſages which have really ſome obſcurity in them. Thus, with regard to the words of our text: if we will make allowance for the figurative manner of expreſſion; compare the paſſage with others which have a manifeſt relation to it; and conſider how the apoſtles themſelves underſtood it, by the tenor of their writings and conduct after they receiv'd this commiſſion: we ſhall find the meaning to be ſomething very different from the forced interpretation of the council of *Trent*. We ſhall find; that when our Saviour *breathed on his apoſtles, and ſaid to them, Receive ye the Holy Ghoſt; whoſeſoever ſins ye remit, they are remitted to them; and whoſeſoever ye retain, they are retained*; his meaning was to aſſure them, that they ſhould receive that infallible guidance and aſſiſtance of the Holy Ghoſt, which ſhould enable them, without any danger of miſtake, to publiſh among men the terms upon which ſinners ſhould be pardoned, and upon the rejection whereof their ſins ſhould remain unforgiven. And hence indeed it will follow; that whoever ſhall in ſucceeding ages comply with

thoſe terms, though declared by uninſpired men, ſhall receive the benefit of God's gracious pardon; and that they who reject thoſe terms ſhall go without forgiveneſs. The effect therefore, of *having ſins remitted or retained*, will in all ages of the church follow upon men's complying or not complying with the terms, which the Holy Ghoſt, conferred on the apoſtles, enabled them infallibly to make known; and conſequently does not depend upon thoſe terms being declared by a prieſt, any more than by a layman. If any man whatever, whether in holy orders or not, can be ſo happy as *to convert a ſinner from the error of his way*, by bringing him to a due ſenſe of it, and perſuading him to comply with thoſe terms of pardon and acceptance, which the apoſtles were enabled infallibly to publiſh; *he ſhall ſave a ſoul from death, and ſhall hide a multitude of ſins.* Thus we are expreſsly aſſured by one of the apoſtles themſelves; the apoſtle *James*, chap. V. 20. And that this proſpect is not confined to miniſters, or perſons in holy orders, appears from the addreſs in the preceding verſe, to all *the brethren*, to whom the epiſtle is directed; *i. e.* * *to the twelve tribes ſcattered abroad.* To all theſe the apoſtle addreſſes himſelf, when he ſays, *Brethren, if* ANY OF YOU *do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he ſhall ſave a ſoul from death.*

I cannot forbear obſerving by the bye; that the caſe here ſpecified, that of *brethren erring from the truth, and turning from that error*, is

* Chap. I. ver. 1.

is the very caſe of *the lapſed after baptiſm*; in which the church of *Rome* pretends their ſacrament of penance does *jure divino* neceſſarily take place. And yet the apoſtle is ſo far from intimating any neceſſity of confeſſion to a prieſt, or of ſuch ſatisfactions as he ſhall enjoin, or of receiving abſolution from his mouth; that without any difference between prieſt and people, he directs his diſcourſe to the *brethren* in general, and encourages them with the hope, that any of them, if they will uſe their endeavours, may be ſo happy as to *convert a ſinner from the error of his way, and thereby ſave a ſoul from death.*

And, I beſeech you, what is *ſaving a ſoul from death?* Is it a whit leſs than *remitting of ſins*, which is the phraſe in our text? Yet both the one and the other is, we ſee, in the phraſeology of ſcripture, aſcribed to men, who are only the inſtruments of this *remiſſion* and *ſalvation*, by perſuading their brethren to comply with the goſpel methods, to which *remiſſion* and *ſalvation* are promiſed; whereas, in ſtrictneſs of ſpeech, it is certain that none but God can *ſave the ſoul from death*, any more than *remit ſins.*

How evident is it, from this one paſſage of St. *James*, that allowance is to be made for figures of ſpeech? How evident indeed is the neceſſity of this allowance in all writings, and even in converſation? And how much more frequent are ſtrong figures of ſpeech in the oriental writings, than in others? And how viſible is it, that the ſcriptures abound with ſuch manners

ners of expreſſion; which yet, by the circumſtances wherein they are delivered, are eaſy enough to be underſtood? If it be objected, that it is hard to ſuppoſe this ſhould be done in the delivery of a commiſſion; the objection is eaſily anſwered from precedents in the old teſtament; where the prophets are, in receiving their commiſſion, told by the Moſt High himſelf, and without any danger of miſtaking his meaning, that they are ſent to do thoſe very things, which 'tis plain they are only ſent to declare. There is no need of quoting to this purpoſe any more than that one remarkable paſſage, *Jer.* I. 9, 10. *Then the Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the Lord ſaid unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. See, I have this day ſet thee over the nations and over the kingdoms; to root out, and to pull down, and to deſtroy, and to throw down, and to build, and to plant.*

Will the Romaniſts ſay, that the prophet was to do all theſe things in the literal ſenſe? Or will they pretend, that theſe words, together with the context from *ver.* 5. ſignify any more, than that *Jeremiah* was choſen of God, and by him perfectly furniſhed, and after an extraordinary manner ſent forth, to declare his mind and will to the nations; and that the declarations ſo made ſhould have their effect? Why, all this we allow was done by our bleſſed Lord with regard to the apoſtles; and affirm that their commiſſion in our text is to be underſtood to this purpoſe, and not concerning the power

power of *remitting* or *retaining ſins* in the literal ſenſe.

If we will judge how the apoſtles themſelves underſtood their commiſſion, by the work in which they chiefly employ'd themſelves; it will be eaſy to ſee, that they underſtood it to mean the preaching that goſpel, upon the reception or rejection of which men ſhou'd be finally happy or unhappy. And when Chriſt choſe them to be the firſt preachers of a doctrine, far from being favourable to the intereſts of deſigning men, or the pleaſures of the voluptuous; which for its naked ſimplicity would be deſpiſed by ſome, and muſt expect to meet with oppoſition from thoſe in every nation, who were prejudiced in favour of ſentiments and cuſtoms already in faſhion; it was in great wiſdom that he conferred on them the Holy Ghoſt: for hereby they were not only let into a more clear and comprehenſive view of his whole counſel, and better eſtabliſh'd in it, than under their remaining prejudices they cou'd otherwiſe have been; but were likewiſe furniſhed with extraordinary powers, for proving the certainty of their miſſion from him, and the certainty likewiſe of their delivering his true mind and will. Theſe powers they accordingly exercis'd on proper occaſions, as appears by their hiſtory: but all in ſubſerviency to their grand work of preaching the goſpel, and promoting in that way the intereſt of their maſter's kingdom. In which work they employ'd ſo much of their time; that if they had had any notion of the neceſſity of auricular confeſſions and authorita-

tive abſolutions, which it is plain they had not; yet it wou'd have been impoſſible for them to attend the ſervice, tho' of all men in the world the fitteſt for it, becauſe of that power of *diſcerning ſpirits*, which among other gifts of the Holy Ghoſt was imparted to them. And can any man believe, that the apoſtles underſtood the words in our text concerning authoritative abſolutions; and that yet we ſhou'd have no account in the new teſtament of the thouſands who muſt daily have flock'd to them in confeſſion? What! not come to the apoſtles for abſolution! who received immediately, from their maſter's own mouth, the authority to grant it! No: the apoſtles had taught no ſuch doctrine; having no notion that their maſter meant any thing like it: and therefore no wonder the people followed no ſuch practice.

Indeed, we need only conſider the words of miſſion, compared with the apoſtles practice, and that of their Lord himſelf who ſent them, to convice us what was the work, in which Chriſt deſign'd they ſhould be employ'd, when he ſent them forth. The words of miſſion are: *As my Father hath ſent me, even ſo ſend I you.* Now I ask; What was the errand, upon which Chriſt here ſent his apoſtles? Was it to ſit privately in judgment upon men's ſecret ſins, and to enjoin them penances according to their own will and pleaſure, and then give them abſolution? Or was it to publiſh to the world his goſpel, *with the demonſtration of the Spirit and power*; that goſpel, which himſelf had taught them, and which he had aſſured them the Holy Ghoſt

Ghoſt * *ſhould bring to their remembrance?* One wou'd think, that Chriſt himſelf plainly enough told his apoſtles what was the errand upon which he ſent them, by ſaying, that *as his Father ſent him, even ſo he ſent them.* For Chriſt in the whole tenor of his miniſtry declared, that the Father ſent him to make known unto men his counſel for their ſalvation; and that it wou'd have its effect in the ſalvation of thoſe who embraced it, and the deſtruction of thoſe who ſhou'd reject it: and this no doubt was the errand, upon which he ſent his apoſtles. This is indeed viſible beyond doubt in the two other places, where Chriſt's commiſſion to his diſciples is recorded: and therefore to them we ought to have recourſe for explaining the figurative expreſſions in our text. *Mark* XVI. 15, 16. *Go ye into all the world, and preach the goſpel to every creature: he that believeth, and is baptized, ſhall be ſaved; and he that believeth not ſhall be condemned.* The other paſſage, *Matt.* XXVIII. is more to our preſent purpoſe in one reſpect; as it is prefaced, like our text itſelf, with the mention of Chriſt's own miſſion from the Father, attended with powers which no man will be ſo extravagant as to affirm he communicated to others. *All power is given unto me in heaven and earth: go ye therefore, and teach all nations,* &c. This was the errand upon which the apoſtles were ſent; *the teaching men to obey whatſoever Chriſt had commanded:* and this work, he ſignifies, it was his mind ſhou'd be carried on *even unto the end of the world,* by

 promiſing

* John XIV. 26.

promiſing his preſence and bleſſing to all thoſe in any age who ſhou'd teach the ſame doctrine. But it will no more follow from hence, that thoſe others in ſucceeding ages ſhould be attended with all the ſame powers with which the apoſtles were attended, than that the apoſtles themſelves had *all power in heaven and earth* given to them, as Chriſt declares in the beginning of this paſſage they were given to him.

But farther: the interpretation which I have given of my text, with regard to the awful effects of the apoſtles preaching, is confirmed by the words of St. *Paul*, 2 Cor. II. 15, 16. which are very near as ſtrong in the phraſeology, as thoſe in the text itſelf. *We are unto God a ſweet ſavour of Chriſt, in them that are ſaved, and in them that periſh: to the one we are the ſavour of death unto death; and to the other the ſavour of life unto life.* And 'tis to the ſame purpoſe, that the ſame apoſtle ſpeaks of *his goſpel*, i. e. the goſpel which he preached, as that, *according to which God would hereafter judge the ſecrets of men by Jeſus Chriſt.* Rom. II. 16.

And, that this is the true meaning of *remitting and retaining ſins* in my text, appears plainly from that other text, preſs'd by the council of *Trent* into the ſervice of authoritative abſolutions; *Matt.* XVI. 19. where the power of *binding and looſing* is evidently the ſame as that of *retaining and remitting ſins* in my text; and *the giving unto* Peter *the keys of the kingdom of heaven* leads us to the true meaning of *binding and looſing*, and conſequently explains the *remitting*

*ting and retaining ſins*, ſpoken of in my text. The *giving unto* Peter *the keys of the kingdom of heaven* manifeſtly receives its explication from his having the honour firſt to preach the doctrine of the kingdom of heaven after our Lord's reſurrection and aſcenſion, whereby that kingdom was eſtabliſhed. Whoever was firſt after this eſtabliſhment employ'd to preach the doctrine of the kingdom of heaven, might very well be ſaid, as it were, to open the gates of that kingdom, by *the keys* given him for that purpoſe. Now it is obſervable, that as ſome one perſon muſt be firſt in opening the doctrine of the kingdom of heaven; ſo the grant of *the keys* was made to one perſon; to *Peter* alone, and never to any other: but the power of *binding and looſing*, mention'd in the ſame verſe, and in *Matt.* XVIII, and that of *remitting and retaining ſins*, in *John* XX. were granted to all the reſt of the apoſtles in conjunction with him: and therefore that trite phraſe, of *the power of the keys*, confounded as it is with the power of *binding and looſing*, *remitting and retaining*, and applied to authoritative deciſions of eccleſiaſtical men, plainly appears to have no foundation.

But tho' the grant of *the keys* is not the ſame thing as the *binding and looſing*, preſently after mentioned; yet it leads to the true meaning of it. Chriſt aſſures *Peter*, that in his preaching he ſhould be enabled ſo effectually to deliver the terms, on which the Moſt High would receive ſinners to mercy, as that no perſons upon earth who comply'd with thoſe terms ſhould fail of being forgiven; and ſo to denounce the

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wrath of God againſt the unbelieving and diſobedient, that whoever ſhould reject his doctrine, and deſpiſe the authority upon which it was founded, ſhould not obtain pardon. This is the plain meaning of the promiſe made to *Peter*, that *what he ſhould bind upon earth, ſhould be bound in heaven, and what he ſhould looſe on earth, ſhould be looſed in heaven.* Now ſince this *binding and looſing* is the ſame as *retaining and remitting ſins*, and is in the promiſe to *Peter* intimately connected with preaching the doctrine of the kingdom of heaven: the true meaning of *binding and looſing*, and conſequently of *retaining and remitting ſins* by virtue of a commiſſion from Chriſt, muſt be preaching that doctrine, according to the tenor of which men ſhould have their ſins either *remitted* or *retained* by the great Judge of all. And well might they, who were ſent with a ſpecial commiſſion from Chriſt, to preach that goſpel, according to the reception of which the condition of its hearers was to be finally determined; well might they, I ſay, in a figurative manner of ſpeech, be ſaid by their preaching to *bind* upon the rejecters of it their great *ſin* in rejecting it, or in the language of our text, *to retain their ſins*; and to *looſe thoſe from their ſins*, or *remit their ſins to them*, who embraced a goſpel which expreſsly promiſes forgiveneſs to all that embrace it. In a literal ſenſe the words are not capable of being taken, without great abſurdity, and encroaching upon the prerogative of God. And the ſenſe in which I have explain'd them agrees ſo perfectly with a number of other ſcriptures which are clear to

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the ſame purpoſe, and with the character and conduct of the apoſtles, to whom the commiſſion was given; as plainly ſhews this to be the true meaning. And thus the whole Romiſh doctrine of authoritative abſolution, built upon the perverſion of our Saviour's words, at once falls to the ground.

If we were to conſider that other paſſage, where *binding and looſing* are mention'd; I mean * *Matt.* XVIII. we ſhou'd find that it is as far from the purpoſe of the Romiſh ſacrament of penance, as thoſe already conſidered; tho' it is certain it has a relation to ſins committed by chriſtian brethren, whereas the others relate to the effects of preaching the goſpel. It is ſomewhat uncertain, whether the words were directed to the apoſtles alone; or to other diſciples with them. But if it was to the apoſtles alone; yet 'tis plain it was not in their apoſtolical character, but as ſubjects in general of *the kingdom of heaven*, mention'd in the beginning of the chapter; and relates to treſpaſſes committed by one chriſtian againſt another. In which caſes, our Saviour, inſtead of ſending the offender to confeſs to a prieſt, adviſes the perſon offended to go, and in a kind and gentle manner to admoniſh his brother, in order to reclaim him from his ſin. Upon failure

* Matt. XVIII. 15—18. *Moreover, if thy brother ſhall treſpaſs againſt thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone. If he ſhall hear thee, thou haſt gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more; that in the mouth of two or three witneſſes every word may be eſtabliſhed. And if he ſhall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church. But if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican. Verily, I ſay unto you: whatſoever ye ſhall bind on earth, ſhall be bound in heaven; and whatſoever ye ſhall looſe on earth, ſhall be looſed in heaven.*

lure of ſucceſs in this charitable attempt, he is directed to take with him one or two more; ſtill with the ſame deſign, but ſo ordered as to carry more force with the admonition. If this is likewiſe unſucceſsful; then *the church, i. e.* a ſociety of the faithful, is to be acquainted with the affair: and if the admonition of the church, acting ſuitably to the known mind of Chriſt its lawgiver, is rejected; our Lord ſignifies, that the good admonition, given ſo agreeably to the duty of thoſe that gave it, and ſo wickedly rejected by the offender, will *bind* his ſin upon him; and that their judgment in ſeparating from him, ſhall be confirm'd *in heaven.* And he further ſignifies, that their judgment would likewiſe be ratified in heaven, if upon good evidence of his repentance he ſhou'd be reſtored to their communion. But ſtill, in this, as well as in preaching the goſpel before mentioned, there muſt be underſtood ſome rule, ſome certain rule, of the mind of Chriſt, laid down and obſerved, before the effect of *binding* or *looſing* can take place. The thing is not left to the will and pleaſure, of the preacher in the one caſe, or of the offended perſon, or even the church itſelf, in the other: but the mind of the lawgiver, regarded or not regarded, is that which *looſes* a perſon from his ſins, or *binds* them upon him; tho', according to the phraſeology of ſcripture, it is in a figurative ſenſe aſcribed to the inſtrument or means, by which this *binding* or *looſing* is effected. And in this ſenſe St. * *Paul*, ſpeaking of a perſon, from whom, for a notorious

* 2 Cor. II. 5---11.

notorious offence, the church of *Corinth* had withdrawn, and who had afterwards given ſufficient proofs of ſincere repentance, adviſes the *Corinthians* to *forgive* him; and declares that *he forgave him alſo*; and that whomſoever he had forgiven on their account, he had done it *in the perſon of Chriſt*, i. e. by his authority, and under the infallible aſſurance of his approbation.

Thus, I think, are the words of my text fairly reſcued from that falſe gloſs which the council of *Trent* had put upon them. But there are other texts, to which they have recourſe for ſupporting their pretenſions. Particularly, * they force into the ſervice of their ſacrament of penance the words of St. *Paul*, 1 Cor. V. 11, 12. wherein he adviſes the chriſtians of the church of *Corinth not to keep company with any brother who is a fornicator, or covetous, or a drunkard, or an extortioner*; giving this reaſon for it; (which, becauſe it contains the word *judge* in it, is greedily ſnatch'd at) *For what have I to do to judge them alſo that are without? do not ye judge them that are within?* But the bare recital of this text, in its proper connexion, is ſufficient to ſhew, that it relates to open faults, to which a publick cenſure is due; and has no relation to auricular confeſſion or prieſtly abſolution.

'Tis as little to the purpoſe that † they quote the words of the ſame apoſtle to the *Epheſians*, chap. II. ver. 3. wherein he tells them, that *they had been children of wrath, even as others:*



* Con. Trid. Seſs. XIV. cap. 2. † Cap. 5.

for they ſuggeſt no manner of reaſon for confeſſing ſins privately to a prieſt; which is the whole tenor of that chapter of the *Trent* council, where this text is quoted.

As little is it to the purpoſe, that the new teſtament expreſſions, of *violating the temple of God*, 1 Cor. III. 17. *grieving the holy Spirit of God*, Eph. IV. 30. *doing deſpight unto the Spirit of grace*, Heb. X. 29. and *treaſuring up wrath againſt the day of wrath*, Rom. II. 5. are * produced to ſhew, that they who have ſinned after baptiſm ſhould ſubmit to whatever penance the prieſt ſhall be pleaſed to enjoin as a ſatisfaction for their ſins.

Nor is it a whit more to the purpoſe, that the † *Profeſſion of catholic faith*, lately publiſh'd in the *Engliſh* tongue, *for the reception of converts into the church of* Rome, refers us to the old law, 'as a figure of the law of Chriſt,' to favour the Romiſh doctrine and practice of confeſſion. For, what if leproſy was a figure of ſin? What if the leprous were obliged, by the expreſs command of an abrogated diſpenſation, *to ſhew themſelves to the prieſts?* Will it thence follow, that under the new teſtament chriſtians muſt, without any command or direction from Chriſt their law-giver, confeſs their ſins to a prieſt, and take abſolution from him? What if the *Iſraelites* were ‡ obliged to make confeſſion, when they had been guilty of a treſpaſs, in defrauding their neighbours, or taking away their property by violence? What if after reſtitution atonement was according to the Moſaic law

* Cap. 8. † Page 22.

‡ Num. V. 5---8. Lev. VI. 2---7.

law to be made by a prieſt? Yet this will never prove, that under the goſpel, which acknowledges no prieſt but Chriſt himſelf, chriſtians are obliged to confeſs to a miniſter their ſecret ſins; or that forgiveneſs at the hand of God depends upon a mortal man's abſolution. What if upon St. *Paul*'s preaching the goſpel, attended *with the demonſtration of the ſpirit and of power*, by the miracles which he wrought, * *many who believed came publickly, and confeſſed, and ſhewed their deeds?* as, upon the preaching of *John* the baptiſt, † *Jeruſalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, went out to him, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confeſſing their ſins.* Do theſe things lay any obligation upon thoſe who are already become chriſtians, to confeſs their ſins privately to a prieſt, and kneel down before him for pardon? And laſtly; how vile is the perverſion of that text, *Jam.* V. 16. and how wiſely did this catechiſt act, in concealing the greateſt part of the verſe? for the whole verſe runs thus: *Confeſs your faults one to another; and pray for one another; the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.* Now what colour of a reaſon is there to believe, that *confeſſing to one another*, in order to mutual forgiveneſs, could mean confeſſing to the *elders of the church*, mention'd in a quite different caſe in the preceding verſes? The ſame perſons are bid to *confeſs their faults to one another*, who are likewiſe bid *to pray for one another:* and therefore if the people are by this text

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* Acts XIX. 18. † Matt. III. 5, 6.

directed to *confeſs* to the prieſts, the prieſts are likewiſe directed to *confeſs* to the people; if the prieſts are bid to *pray for* the people, ſo are the people bid to *pray for* the prieſts. And I am intirely of opinion; that the prayer here deſcribed, *the* * *inwrought prayer of a righteous man*, even though he never were in orders, would be as much regarded at the throne of grace, and become as effectual for the forgiveneſs of an offence committed againſt himſelf and confeſs'd to him, as if he were poſſeſſed of the higheſt honours the church of *Rome* itſelf is able to confer.

Thus we have ſeen how little there is in the numerous paſſages I have been conſidering, to the purpoſe for which the Romaniſts produce them: that they really mean quite other things than they bring them to prove. We have ſeen in particular, that there is not in the words of my text, on which the greateſt ſtreſs is laid, any authoritative power of abſolution committed unto men; nor any confeſſion to a prieſt inſtituted; tho' the council of *Trent* ſays it contains both. We have ſeen, that what they interpret concerning the power of granting or withholding the pardon of ſin by biſhops and prieſts, was meant by our Saviour concerning the awful effects of preaching his goſpel by the apoſtles, under the infallible guidance of the Holy Ghoſt. We have ſeen, that our Saviour could not be capable of putting ſuch a ſenſe upon his own words, as the council of *Trent* has put; becauſe it is inconſiſtent with the authority of God's own government.

* δέησις ἐνεργουμένη.

government. And an intimation has likewiſe been given of the dangerous tendency of that minute and particular confeſſion, which the church of *Rome* requires the people to make to the prieſts, of the moſt ſecret ſins, together with their circumſtances. But the dangerous tendency of this, and likewiſe of their doctrine of abſolution, deſerves a little more of our attention.

It has been already obſerved, that according to the circumſtances in which confeſſion is eſtabliſhed in the church of *Rome*, there is the utmoſt danger of violating all rules of modeſty and decency; by putting queſtions, under pretence of ſearching ſin to the bottom, which ſhall ſuggeſt wicked thoughts to the minds of young and unexperienc'd perſons, ſuch as otherwiſe wou'd never have enter'd there. But beſides this; auricular confeſſion is directly calculated, as there is no doubt it was deſign'd, to put the poor penitent wholly in the prieſt's power, with regard to eſtate, and reputation, and even life itſelf. The laity, I ſay, muſt in all theſe reſpects be intirely at the mercy of the clergy, if they can be brought to make it a point of conſcience to confeſs to them all their failings. And to what purpoſe is it for the canon law to tell us, * 'that 'if a prieſt reveals what he hears in confeſſion, 'he ſhall be depoſed, and wander about in diſ'grace all the reſt of his life'? If a prieſt who is himſelf *under* the guilt of *mortal ſin* ſhou'd be ſo wicked as to break his oath of ſecrecy; it wou'd be no very great wonder. And in that caſe, what

* Diſt. vii. de pœnit. cap. 2.

what reparation can the ſending him to travel abroad make for the unſpeakable miſchiefs of his perjured treachery? In the mean time, where is the probability, that the Son of God, who had ſo tender an affection for his whole church, as to *purchaſe it with his own blood*, wou'd lay it under the hard neceſſity of ſuch an intire dependence upon its officers?

Then, as to the doctrine of abſolution: I beſeech you to conſider, how directly that tends to the deſtruction of all morality and piety, all virtue and ſerious religion. For, how ſtrong a temptation muſt it be to a man vitiouſly diſpoſed, to be taught, that a prieſt, whom he may hope ſome way or other to influence, can abſolve him from moſt crimes to which his wicked heart is inclined? however, that his biſhop can do it; or at the worſt, that the pope can do it: and that the great judge of all has ſo far put the matter out of his own power, that he muſt confirm in heaven the judicial ſentence which ſhall be paſs'd in his favour here upon earth? What regard, I ſay, will ſuch a man pay to the judgment of the Almighty? what ſenſe of religion will he retain towards him? or what ſenſe of the natural obligations of virtue in his conduct towards men? How will he deſpiſe the doctrine of the neceſſity of reſtraining corrupt affections in order to be truly happy? All thoughts of this kind will be treated with the utmoſt contempt, when he conſiders, that, according to the doctrine of the infallible church, he need only put on an appearance of contrition, confeſs the ſin he has committed or reſolved upon,

on, ſubmit to the penance enjoin'd, and receive abſolution; and that then, having made ſatisfaction for his ſin, he is a clear man, and may go on in a courſe of the like actions, without any neceſſity of a real reformation. Thus the whole proceſs of the Romiſh ſacrament of penance has a tendency to make men regard external performances as an equivalent for inward and real religion, to draw off their minds from attending to it, and at length to extinguiſh the ſenſe of it.

And the tendency this way is the more evident, when we conſider, that in the article of death, as we have already ſeen, all prieſts are obliged to abſolve from all ſins without exception. This the wicked layman knows beforehand: and may thereby be encouraged to indulge himſelf in all manner of ſins, in the expectation of receiving abſolution at laſt, and the viaticum of the euchariſt into the bargain: both of which the * prieſts of the church of *Rome* are, under pain of eccleſiaſtical cenſure, obliged to give to thoſe who are dying by diſtempers, and likewiſe to malefactors juſt before their execution, if they deſire it.

The papiſts indeed, and particularly the author or authors of the † catechiſm already quoted, do not fail to charge ſome proteſtants with undertaking to abſolve dying penitents in a ſolemn manner, as by authority from Chriſt. But this I ſhall not meddle with; my buſineſs being to conſider the doctrine of abſolution

* Inſtit. jur. canon. lib. II. tit. 5.

† Prof. of cath. faith, pag. 21.

abſolution as it ſtands in the church of *Rome*. Now, beſides the natural tendency of their doctrine for encouraging ſin in the courſe of life; I would intreat you to conſider, with regard to a dying ſinner under trouble of mind; which is the wiſer and better method, which more agreeable to the character and duty of a chriſtian miniſter, and more likely to adminiſter real comfort where there is room for it: to declare to him the abundant goodneſs, and yet the perfect purity and rectitude of the divine being; to give him neceſſary inſtructions concerning the diſpoſition which God requires, mingled with aſſurance of his mercy to the truly penitent; to acquaint him with the goſpel terms of forgiveneſs, and exhort and encourage him to comply with them; and then, with hearty prayers for him, to leave him to the mercies of God, and the reflections of his own mind: or to hear his confeſſion, and then ſay;* *I abſolve thee from all cenſures and ſins, in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghoſt.*

But if all profeſs'd miniſters of Chriſt were to act thus conſiſtently with the principles of their religion; if they were to take no more upon them than to explain and exhort, to lay the ſcripture doctrine before the people, and labour to bring them to a compliance with its directions: *the power of the keys, the power of binding and looſing, of remitting and retaining ſins*, and in ſhort, the whole power of the church of *Rome*, would be demoliſh'd, which they are reſolved ſhall at any rate be kept up. Explications,

* Ritual. Roman, pag. 67.

plications, and exhortations, and the miniſtring of ſpiritual comforts, or of divine warnings ſeparate from human terrors, are thought too mean employments for men, who think themſelves ſo capable of diſpoſing God's favours, as to pretend to determine what puniſhments in this life ſhall avail to the pardon of ſin. Of this I have given you a general account already, relating to their doctrine of ſatisfaction. Give me leave now, in the concluſion, to remind you of that doctrine: wherein they teach, that * we 'may ſatisfy God the Father thro' Jeſus Chriſt, 'not only by puniſhments, of our own accord 'undertaken for revenging of ſin, or impoſed 'by the will of the prieſt, according to the 'meaſure of the crime; but alſo by temporal 'ſcourges, inflicted of God, and patiently borne 'by us.' In purſuance of this doctrine it muſt be, that in one of their forms of abſolution, already quoted from their ritual, they join 'whatever evils the penitent himſelf has ſuffered, 'with the paſſion of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, towards his obtaining remiſſion of ſins, and the 'reward of eternal life.' In purſuance of this doctrine they have an extraordinary law, peculiar to themſelves, expreſs'd in the words of pope *Clement* III. and inſerted in the † body of the canon law: wherein it is decreed, with regard to 'thoſe who ſhall take publick proſtitutes 'out of the ſtews, and marry them, that this 'ſhall avail to the forgiveneſs of their ſins:'

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* Con. Trid. Seſſ. XIV. cap. 9.

† Inter opera charitatis non minimum eſt, errantem ab erroris ſemita revocare. Statuimus, ut omnibus, qui publicas mulieres de lupanari extraxerint, et duxerint in uxores; quod agunt, in remiſſionem proficiat peccatorum. *Decr. Gregor. lib.* IV. *tit.* 1. *cap.* 20.

and that for this reaſon; 'that among works of 'charity it is none of the leaſt to call back wan-'derers from the error of their ways.' To this doctrine likewiſe has been owing the ſenſeleſs ſuperſtition of pilgrimages, to our Lady of *Loretto*, to St. *Jago di Compoſtella*, to the holy ſepulchre, and a number of other ſanctified perſons and places. In which pilgrimages, many of them impoſed in penance, as well as others voluntary, men have left their families, ſquander'd away their eſtates, deſtroy'd their health, and uſefulneſs, and often life itſelf. *Eraſmus* has, with inimitable ſpirit and judgment, expoſed theſe follies. I mention them, and the other particulars before named, as amazing inſtances of the preſumption of the Romiſh clergy, and of the real power accruing to them by boldly perſevering in that preſumption. They take to themſelves the prerogative of God, in declaring that ſuch and ſuch things ſhall avail to the pardon of ſins, when God himſelf has made no ſuch promiſe. And, as we have before ſeen, they have the impious preſumption to aſcribe reconciliation with God to their own arbitrary abſolutions. They make the effect of abſolution itſelf to depend upon their own kind intention. They will not allow that the Moſt High can refuſe what they grant, or grant what they have a mind to refuſe. And yet all this is cover'd with the ſpecious pretence of divine authority and commiſſion. In conſequence of all this, they lay upon the people what injunctions they pleaſe, by way of ſatisfaction for ſin: and the inconſiderate people, concluding that theſe muſt be extraordinary men indeed, who perſiſt in the claim of ſuch extraordinary

traordinary powers as by commiſſion from God himſelf, and who appeal to ſcripture for it, which ſcripture they themſelves are not permitted to look into; are before they are aware hurried into an acknowledgment of their ſpiritual powers, and an obedience to all their injunctions. Which obedience is indeed the more eaſy, becauſe the things on which the church of *Rome* lays the greateſt ſtreſs in this doctrine of ſatisfaction, are viſibly ſuch as may be complied with by men of carnal minds; who will ſubmit to any chaſtiſements and external difficulties, provided they may be excuſed from the trouble of ſubduing and mortifying corrupt inclinations. Let them but have their way here, and they will give up all power into the hands of the clergy: and ſo likewiſe will weak ignorant people of better principles, in the hopes of having eternal happineſs ſecured to them by theſe favourites of heaven.

And thus is the very point gained, to which the ambitious clergy turn their whole views. Power, extenſive temporal power, is the darling object of theſe men's deſires. And they enlarge their claims on a ſpiritual account, on purpoſe to increaſe their power in a temporal reſpect; going on from one ſtep to another, till they ſeem to think themſelves as gods over the reſt of the world. Theſe are the men, who are for cruſhing all ſuch as in the leaſt differ from the faſhionable doctrines and ceremonies, to which they themſelves are indebted for their grandeur: and, inſtead of ſoftening matters, out of a tender regard to their brethren's weakneſs, as by virtue of their character they are

obliged to do, take advantage of every little difference, to aggrandize themſelves by widening the breach. They encourage the impoſing of needleſs difficulties upon their brethren; whereby they prevent much of their uſefulneſs to the ſtate: and when once ſuch burdens are laid on, they can never find a ſeaſonable or proper time to have them removed, but employ all their influence to keep them faſt bound. I might have added; that they are not content to lay ſmaller difficulties upon their brethren; but that they perſecute with the utmoſt cruelty, even unto death, for meer differences in ſpeculation; ſo little can they bear to be look'd on as any thing leſs than maſters of the conſciences of all mankind. But the cruelty of the Romiſh perſecutions is a copious ſubject: and is committed to one, who I doubt not will handle it to your ſatisfaction.

When men arrogate thus to themſelves the prerogative of the divine Being, and even a ſuperiority to him, pretending that he cannot forgive where they do not or will not; and when it appears that in all theſe pretenſions they chiefly aim at temporal power; no wonder that deiſm abounds; no wonder, that in *Rome* particularly, the ſeat of the pope, who of all others arrogates the higheſt power to himſelf, there are ſo many deiſts, and ſo many atheiſts. If this be chriſtianity, it is natural for a man to ſay, I will be any thing elſe rather than a chriſtian. And even in proteſtant countries; by how much the more the power of the prieſts in theſe reſpects is cried up, by ſo much the more danger

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is there of men's caſting off all regards to the chriſtian religion.

For the improvement of what you have been hearing, let me intreat you to be thankful to God; whoſe great goodneſs beſtows upon you the ineſtimable bleſſing of liberty to conſult his word, for your inſtruction and comfort. By this ſacred record, which you have in your own hands, you are taught quite other doctrine concerning repentance and remiſſion of ſins, confeſſion and abſolution, than the church of *Rome* teaches. Be exhorted to follow the directions there laid down. And let not what you have now heard, concerning the corruptions of the church of *Rome*, keep you back, but rather excite you, to a ſerious confeſſion of your ſins before God, with abhorrence of them, and reſolutions and the moſt earneſt endeavours againſt them. Let it excite you to ſeek abſolution from that great and wiſe, that juſt and yet gracious governor, whom by your ſins you have offended, and * *with whom* alone *there is forgiveneſs, that he may be feared.* Be not afraid to go to God himſelf, in the name of Jeſus Chriſt. Aſk of him the pardon of your ſins: and you will not be denied. Let it be the ſincere deſire of your hearts, and endeavour of your lives, to pleaſe him: and whenever in any reſpect you have offended him, do not cheriſh or palliate the evil of which you have been guilty: do not plead for it, or harbour it in your affections; and dare not to repeat it in your practice: but humble yourſelves before him againſt whom you have

* Pſal. CXXX. 4.

have ſinned; implore his mercy in the forgiveneſs of it, and his gracious aſſiſtance to get rid of its power. And whereinſoever you have offended againſt your fellow creatures; if the offence requires a particular acknowledgment, make that acknowledgment to him whom you have offended, and make all the reparation you are able: and if he has a grain of goodneſs in him, he will do his duty in a hearty forgiveneſs: however you will not fail of acceptance with God, and of that peace and comfort, which naturally follow the diſcharge of your own duty. If any man has by his follies ſo involv'd himſelf, that he knows not how to direct his conduct: let him conſult any wiſe and good man, whether miniſter or not miniſter, it matters not; and get all the aſſiſtance he can for his guidance, and for reſtoring the comfort of his mind. Such a confeſſion as this, upon extraordinary occaſions, no ſerious chriſtian, of any denomination whatever, can think improper. But then remember: that you are to follow this advice ſo far only, as it ſhall approve itſelf to your own deliberate judgment, from its conformity to reaſon and ſcripture: that a grave experienced perſon, of any employment in life, may be very uſeful by his advice: but that no man, of any character, can oblige you to follow it in obedience to him; or, without breaking in upon the authority of God himſelf, pretend to give abſolution from ſin upon ſuch obedience, as the Romiſh prieſts do.

If I am ſpeaking to any of the deluded votaries of that corrupt church; I wou'd moſt earneſtly intreat them to ſatisfy their minds with true

true repentance towards God, reſtitution to their neighbour, and real amendment of life; without any anxiety about confeſſing to a prieſt, or receiving his abſolution. Be ſo good to your own ſouls, as to believe the words of Chriſt himſelf; who does not inſiſt upon ſuch penances and ſatisfactions as your prieſts lay upon you: * *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you reſt:* † *Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wiſe caſt out.* You want no other mediator to appear before God in your behalf; no prieſt, to make or to repeat that atonement, which he himſelf has completely made already, and which he made ‖ *once for all. He is able to ſave to the uttermoſt all that come unto God by him; ſeeing he ever liveth to make interceſſion for them.* He has directed his apoſtle to aſſure us, *that* ‡ *if we confeſs our ſins, he is faithful and juſt to forgive us our ſins, and to cleanſe us from all unrighteouſneſs,* And herein he does not make that difference which the council of *Trent* makes; of ſins before, and ſins after baptiſm. Nor is there in this, or any other text in the whole new teſtament, any mention or intimation of the neceſſity of confeſſion to a prieſt, or of ſubmitting to his arbitrary penances, in order to abſolution. The confeſſion is to be made to God; as the abſolution is to come from him.

To conclude. Let us all, both miniſters and people, converſe daily with the ſacred oracles; which will be our ſureſt defence againſt corruptions of all kinds. My reverend brethren in the miniſtry, I am ſatisfied, are too wiſe to be diſpleaſed

* Matt. xi. 28. † John vi. 37.
‖ Heb. x. 10. ix. 12. ‡ 1 John i. 9.

pleaſed at being put in mind of the importance of this duty: its importance to their eſtabliſhment as chriſtians and proteſtants, and to their uſefulneſs as miniſters. And if chriſtians in general would make it their practice to ſtudy the ſcriptures with impartial minds, we ſhould have no alarms of popery: for ſo long as this practice is kept up, it is impoſſible that the corrupt doctrines of the church of *Rome* ſhould be entertain'd.

*F I N I S.*

*Printed for* J. Noon,

TWO Sermons: *The one againſt the traditions of the church of* Rome; *the other about the right manner of contending for the chriſtian faith:* preached at *Barbican* in *London*, *October* 15. and 22. M DCC XXXII. on occaſion of collecting for the relief of the perſecuted Proteſtants of *Saltzburg*. By Joseph Burroughs.

Sermons preached on ſeveral occaſions, by James Burroughs.

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